

**Submission from**

**The Rainy River District of Ontario**

**Regarding the**

**Agricultural Policy Framework (APF)**

**March 2007**

# Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Comments</b>	<b>7</b>

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Background Information**

**The agricultural area of the Rainy River District is situated in the most southwesterly portion of Northwestern Ontario. It runs about 100 km between Lake of the Woods to the west and Rainy Lake to the east and about 35 km between the Rainy River to the south and the Precambrian shield to the north. The topography within the agricultural area is similar to the flat grassland of the prairies. It is a transition area, where the grasslands are interspersed with Great Lakes St. Lawrence forest on undeveloped land, and surrounded by boreal forest to the north.**

**Within the 2001 census, there were 326 farms in the district, with 174 having 400 acres and over. Of these farms, 189 raised beef. Dairy producers accounted for 19 farms. A few other farms produced elk, bison, hogs, honey, grains, other field crops, fruits and vegetables. Most farm families have at least one member earning off-farm income.**

## **Executive Summary**

The Executive Summary features input highlights as decided upon by a representative cross-section of participants. The draft Executive Summary was widely distributed to agricultural groups, municipalities and participants for feedback.

### **Rainy River District Vision**

The participants thought that the wording of the APF vision did not reflect the views of the people from the Rainy River District. An alternate vision is:

***“A truly sustainable industry that focuses on delivering wholesome food and non food products and services to local markets, and to all Canadlans, before serving off-shore markets. Guiding principls are fairness, environmental responsibility, and regional dlversity and self-rellance.”***

### **Business Risk Management (BRM)**

The supply managed systems, such as the milk quota within the dairy industry, offer income stability through production discipline, import controls, and producer pricing. Supply managed systems could be expanded to other commodities.

Plans should be in place to deal with potential disasters such as disease, weather, and trade interruptions. This would provide more effective solutions and prevent delays in implementation. Regional and Municipal governments should be directly involved in planning, and delivering, local disaster relief.

There is a general discontent with the CAIS program. The payments could be made more equitable for smaller producers by reducing the cap from \$3,000,000 to \$300,000.

Business risk should not be reduced at the expense of the environment. Increasing environmental risk, to improve competitiveness, is not an option.

### **Innovation and Science**

The current value chain does not serve producers well. Producers, processors, retailers and consumers should all be treated fairly within the value chain.

Government assistance should go toward supporting, and building, infrastructure that will stabilize agriculture.

Universities typically share research costs with industry partners who can decide how the research is designed, and whether results can be published. When

private industry decides, through their funding decisions, which researchers will be working and teaching at the universities, they influence the opinions that are being taught. Proposals for research should go through a process that does not favour any particular researcher or bias.

Research that receives any amount of public funding should be published, regardless of results.

Research should be objective and independent.

## **Market Development and Trade**

Environmental, labour, and quality standards that apply to Canadian producers should also apply to off-shore suppliers.

Labels need to be clear. If it reads, “Product of Canada,” it should be 100% produced in Canada, not just repackaged in Canada.

The focus should be on meeting local market needs, and supplying the Canadian people, before serving off-shore markets.

## **Renewal**

Apprenticeships, exchange programs, and other learning opportunities should be encouraged, so that the next generation is able to successfully supply food to our country. Agricultural educational institutions should put more emphasis on hands-on training so that more graduates are likely to become farmers, rather than employees of agro business.

Farmers need affordable continuing education courses and training. These opportunities should be available locally, so that farmers do not have to leave home.

Farming should provide an adequate return on investment and labour, so that farmers can expect a reasonable standard of living. Any agricultural policy that ignores the legitimate need, and right, for primary producers to earn a fair return on labour, and investment, is inherently inequitable and unsustainable.

## **Food Safety and Quality**

To prevent unfair competition, imported foods must be required to meet the same safety and quality standards as domestic products.

Labeling on imported foods should include the country of origin, input methodology, labour standards, ingredients (including any food additives or preservatives), and storage and transportation history.

**Greater value should be placed on local Canadian products than on imported food. Regulations should accommodate small, local, and artesian food production. Producers should be allowed to supply local markets by selling vegetables, meat, eggs and milk at the farm gate. Local food systems will result in a safer food supply, fresher products, reduced greenhouse gases emissions, better environmental stewardship and increased farm incomes, with more jobs remaining in the area.**

**It is important that food additives and preservatives be continuously studied, monitored and labeled to help reduce negative health implications such as headaches, migraines, asthma, ADHD, allergies and cancer in children and adults.**

**A change away from the cheap food policy is needed. This policy makes it difficult for farmers to make a living. We should look more at the value of the food than at the price.**

**The “West Hawk Lake” line is impractical because the majority of the animals shipped from the Rainy River District go to the west. If this line is imposed, the producers in our area would not be able to market animals because the cost to ship to the east would be practically prohibitive. The “West Hawk Lake” line should be flexible depending on the issues at hand and the area affected. For example, if a contagious animal disease outbreak occurs in Southern Ontario, the line could be established in the Nipigon area. In this example, Northwestern Ontario could continue to ship animals west.**

**Policy decisions should be scientifically based, not as a result of lobbying efforts.**

## **Environment**

**Canadian farmers should be allowed to sell carbon credits to Canadian companies requiring credits.**

**Small scale alternate energy production on farms should be encouraged. These would be less vulnerable than large-scale projects and would ensure a more stable and diverse power supply.**

**Farmers should be compensated with a “tipping fee” for bio-solids applied to the land.**

**The general public wants a clean environment and must be willing to carry the cost. Protecting environmental values should be worth more than the value of lost production, to ensure that farmers become strong advocates for environmental protection. This may mean compensating farmers for land taken out of production for environmental purposes.**

**Expert advice and guidance is needed to help farmers rehabilitate, protect, and maintain the environment.**

# Comments

The comments are a collection of all input gathered from the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) Consultation on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at the Emo Legion PLUS individual written submissions. They are in no particular order, and are numbered to make data sorting easier.

## **APF Vision:**

***"An industry that is innovative in seizing evolving market demands for food and non-food products and services within an environment that fosters prosperity and opportunity for the entire value chain, creating benefits for all Canadians."***

1. The wording of the vision should be changed.
2. The vision is lacking localism.
3. The top-down vision does not serve farmers.
4. The vision appears to have been written by/for large agri-food industry, not producers.

## **RR vision:**

***"A truly sustainable industry that focuses on delivering wholesome food and non food products and services to local markets, and to all Canadians, before serving off-shore markets. Guiding principals are fairness, environmental responsibility, and regional diversity and self-reliance."***

## **Principals**

1. Regulations often don't allow farmers to feed their neighbours.
2. We need food safety for all. The ban on allowing butchers to process uninspected meat means that farmers may be forced to process their own meat in dirty barns and garages. This does not promote food safety for farmers.
3. Regulations are about commerce. Food born illness outbreaks are coming from large operations, not small. A diverse system is less vulnerable.
4. Canada is quick to give up markets to pacify food suppliers.
5. Imported foods often do not meet the standards of Canadian products.
6. Regulations often hurt small primary producers.
7. Commodity prices are at an all time low.
8. Local food systems produce less Green House Gases (GHG) when food isn't being trucked around as much.
9. Food systems should serve the local market first and sell the excess to other areas.
10. When we encourage "market forces" we are promoting poor diets.
11. Public health sector should promote healthy food more strongly.
12. Funding should be available to promote farming and farm products.

13. We export safer food than we import.
14. Local products are better for environmental and human health.

### **Business Risk Management (BRM)**

1. The supply managed systems, such as the milk quota within the dairy industry, offer income stability. Supply managed systems could be expanded to other commodities.
2. BRM should support producers under contract. They are not allowed to join Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization (CAIS) program.
3. BRM should be community based. Municipalities could deliver programs, decentralizing the process and diversifying the program. Local areas should determine their direction. Regional and municipal governments should have direct and fast input regarding disaster relief in their area(s).
4. BRM should not favour large producers. 80% of the benefits go to 5% of producers.
5. Government programs are often not adequate. We had a severe drought in the Rainy River District in 2006 but we were not covered.
6. We should take a 2 pronged approach and consider business risk and environmental risk separately. Business risk should not be reduced at the expense of environmental risk. Increasing environmental risk is not an option.
7. Different levels of government do not communicate well with each other at times.
8. All levels of government should agree on the definition of a disaster.
9. There should be pre-planning for potential disasters, such as disease, weather, and trade to prevent delays or catch-up solutions.
10. CAIS should make payments more equitable for smaller producers and reduce the cap from \$3,000,000 to \$300,000.
11. Diversity helps to ensure profitability.
12. The only short term fix for agriculture is direct help for farmers. For example, in Switzerland, the government considers the ability of the country to feed itself and the viability of rural communities important enough that it supports farmers. In this case, the further up the mountain and the more difficult the production, the larger the subsidies.

### **Innovation and Science**

1. An integrated industry results in farmers becoming contractors and certain crops require specific chemicals and are tied to specific markets.
2. We need a geographic value chain not just a value chain from producer to consumer.
3. The value chain should ensure that the producer is adequately compensated. (e.g., Cargill's *Silver Beef* or the *Certified Angus Beef* brands command a 25% premium at the retail level, and so, should return more than an additional two to five cents per pound to the producer.) The producers, processors, retailers, and consumers should be treated fairly in

- the value chain.
4. Farmers need to participate more and band together to control value chains.
  5. Farmers have been regulated out of the value chain.
  6. Supply Management ensures profitability.
  7. Government handouts should go into infrastructure that will stabilize agriculture.
  8. Often farmers produce an excellent product only to see it degraded by processing and “blending down”.
  9. Universities share research costs with industry partners who can decide how the research is designed and whether results can be published. When private industry decides, through funding decisions, which researchers will be working and teaching at the universities, they influence the opinions that are being taught. Proposals should go through a process that does not favour any particular researcher or bias.
  10. Publicly funded research, whether partial or total funding, should be published regardless of the results.
  12. Research should be objective and independent

## **Market Development and Trade**

1. Other countries should not be allowed to steal the brand (e.g., Organics) using research and development paid for in Canada.
2. Labels need to be clear. For example, Canada #1 should mean, “Product of Canada”. If it is “Product of Canada,” it should be 100% produced in Canada, not just repackaged in Canada.
3. We have to get back to defining our values. Branding should reflect Canadian values.
4. The same standards (environment, labour, quality) should apply to off-shore suppliers as apply to Canadian suppliers.
5. Price should not be the only value. “Unfair competition” should not always be determined by whether it is good for the consumer (and not necessarily the producer.)
6. We need regulations that don't block access to local markets.
7. We should have Green House Gas labeling.
8. Too much of our trade is big government deals with other governments or big business.
9. Our trading practices should consider the harm to local farmers in other countries.
10. We need regulations that allow access to local and regional markets.
11. We should supply local markets before looking for off-shore markets.
12. Further development of Canadian agriculture should not be reliant on exporting raw commodities.
13. Local producers do not have time to research international markets themselves. There should be a government representative to research international opportunities and communicate this information to local producers.

14. There is an issue regarding cattle shipping. When the border closed in 2003, due to B.S.E., the In-Transit Agreement was affected. Cattle are once again hauled the arduous trip around by Kenora to the Manitoba Markets at considerable extra time and expense. We need to re-instate our In-Transit Agreement, and develop a permit system that will allow convenient, affordable, and hassle-free movement of cattle and other livestock through Minnesota to Manitoba.

## **Renewal**

1. Farmers should expect to be able to make a living on the farm. Farming should provide adequate return for investment and labour.
2. Apprenticeship, exchange programs, and other learning opportunities should be encouraged, so as to create a new generation which is able to successfully supply food to our country.
3. Small inefficient farms should not be supported.
4. We need affordable, continuing education courses and training that do not take farmers away from home.
5. Programs that help small-scale producers with innovation, without high cost, should be developed.
6. Farmers should encourage their children to become farmers.
7. Consumers should know that they are paying for quality. We have to quit letting the Agri-food industry claim to be the experts.
8. Agricultural educational institutions should put more emphasis on hands-on training so that more graduates will become farmers, instead of working for the ag industry and suppliers.
9. Going back to the farm after becoming educated should not be perceived as a career failure.

## **Food Safety and Quality**

1. Safety and quality of food is most important.
2. Regulations exclude food localism.
3. There are too many regulations and too many people involved. We don't need the Health Unit, OMAFRA and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada all making laws regarding public health, agriculture and agri-food. It's getting so that farmers need a lawyer on staff just to know whether or not they are breaking the law.
4. Regulations are put in place so that an economy of scale is required to comply and puts small producers and remote areas at a disadvantage.
5. Financial resources should be put towards information and education instead of focusing on enforcement.
6. The "West Hawk Lake" line is impractical because the majority of the animals shipped from the Rainy River District go to the west. If this line is imposed, the producers in our area would not be able to market animals because the cost to ship to the east would be practically prohibitive. The "West Hawk Lake" line should be flexible depending on the issues at hand and the area affected. For

- example, if a contagious animal disease outbreak occurs in Southern Ontario, the line could be established in the Nipigon area. In this example, Northwestern Ontario could continue to ship animals west.
7. Food safety rules should enhance consumer confidence.
  8. Consumers should have a choice. People who want to buy local meat should be able to.
  9. Bureaucratic regulations are killing our country.
  10. Ag Canada allowed industry to feed ruminants to ruminants. The whole mad cow crisis would not have happened if industry hadn't decided to try to make animal feed out of garbage.
  11. Policy decisions should be scientifically based, not as a result of lobbying efforts.
  12. Regulations should allow for, and accommodate, small, local, and artisan food production.
  13. Canada needs to make sure that imported foods have been produced to the same safety and quality standards as in Canada, from start to finish. By requiring more of Canadian food products than from imported food, an unfair competitive advantage is given to those with lower safety and environmental standards.
  14. Labels should include the country of origin, input methodology and labour standards. This system will allow us (Canada) to check into issues such as animal and plant health, and child labour.
  15. Local areas, like the Rainy River District, need regulations to allow producers to sell their products from the farm gate. In rural areas it is important that local people are able to buy fresh products from the farmers (vegetables, meat, eggs and milk.) There is also a need for regional systems for the food industry to keep our food safe. We need systems for labeling specific to the region/area, and description of storage and type of transportation. If a local area infrastructure is set up it will lead to decreased greenhouse gases due to shorter lines of transportation between producers and consumers, fresher products that do not need additives, better stewardship of the environment because of less intensive farming, less use of chemicals, better incomes for the farmers, and more jobs remaining in the area.
  16. More value should be given to local, Canadian produced food than imported food.
  17. It is important that food additives and preservatives be continuously studied, monitored and labeled to help reduce negative health implications such as headaches, migraines, asthma, ADHD, allergies, and cancer in children and adults.
  18. A change away from the cheap food policy is needed. This policy makes it difficult for farmers to make a living. We should look more at the value of the food than at the price.

## **Environment**

- 1. In Canada, carbon credits should be available to Canadian farmers, not rain forests in foreign countries.**
- 2. If protecting environmental values is worth more than the value of lost production, it will ensure that farmers become strong advocates for environmental protection. Farmers should be compensated for looking after the environment. When a farmer takes land out of production for environmental purposes, he/she should be compensated for more than the production value of the land lost.**
- 3. The general public wants a clean environment and must be willing to carry the cost.**
- 4. Global marketing generates more GHG's than local marketing. The inclusion of "Food Miles" on labeling would allow consumers to realize just how far some of their food has traveled, and the amount of fossil fuels used to get this food to the market.**
- 5. Farmers get more blame than they deserve on environmental issues.**
- 6. Growing corn for biofuel isn't a good idea because it returns an energy premium of only 15% and that does not take into account the energy used in manufacturing fertilizer and chemicals, or the environmental cost to the farmland.**
- 7. Cutting all the poplar is turning our area into a prairie. Vacant land should be planted to trees.**
- 8. Small scale alternate energy production on farms should be encouraged. This would reduce the vulnerability of large-scale projects and ensure a more stable and diverse power supply.**
- 9. Bio-solids and industrial waste that has been deemed good for farmland should represent an income opportunity, not another input cost, for farmers.**
- 10. Canadian farmers should be allowed to sell carbon credits to Canadian companies requiring credits.**
- 11. Farmers should be compensated through a "tipping fee" for bio-solids applied to land.**
- 12. Food labels should include the environmental costs, both in terms of harm done and the regulatory costs to producers and processors.**
- 13. Farmers could use expert advice and guidance on how to rehabilitate, protect, and maintain the environment.**